



FUNERAL CHAPEL

Dedicated To Those We Serve

Funerals & Children

After all the thousands of books, tapes, pamphlets, programs, videos and seminars that have been devoted to the subject of children and funerals over the last 30 years, the question still arises - "Should we bring children to the funeral?"

For those who are familiar with the literature on grief and mourning, the answer is a quick "yes". It is clear, however, from the frequency of the question that even though we have thousands of pieces of information on the subject of children and funerals, most parents have not or have chosen not to read the material.

This state of affairs is understandable given the attitude most people have concerning loss and death.

In any event from a funeral counseling perspective, if the child would like to participate in a funeral and he or she are old enough to share in such a serious event it is probably wise to let them attend. If they do not want to come, it is usually a sign that they have already acquired anxiety about death and this should be worked through carefully.

It is not wise to force children to attend if they are quite upset, but if they are included in other family activities it would be natural to let them share in the funeral regardless. It can be an important learning experience for them.

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Children are responsive to emotional happenings in the family. Their factual world is very limited but their feeling world is limitless. They may not understand all that is going on, but they feel a part of whatever it is. When there is some kind of ceremony they want to be part of it because they love happenings. They need not be expected to understand it all. A little girl can be a flower girl at a wedding without understanding all about sex and marriage. A child can attend a funeral without understanding all about loss and death. Yet if they are excluded they are apt to think something is wrong. Their imaginations go to work, which often create a more stressful and exaggerated reality than the death event itself. They pick up anxiety rather than the healthy attitude that we would like to communicate.

Therefore, in most instances it is wise to include children rather than to exclude them. If they are too young to attend the more formal services, it might be possible to go to the funeral home at a time when there is no service. They can see the beautiful flowers, sense the quiet dignity of the setting, see the casket with the body prepared for viewing, and have their questions answered in a simple, honest manner.

Then rather than being filled with anxiety, they may well gain the idea that death is something that can be wisely managed. They see a role model in mourning practices.

With children, as with adults, it is important to remember that an honest fear of death can help them to protect and preserve life, but anxiety about death may lead to unwise and life-threatening behavior that is designed to test the boundaries of life and often injure life in the process. It may be that death anxiety planted in early childhood leads to drug use, reckless driving, and death-defying games like "chicken" and "Russian roulette".